

FRANK SCHAEFFER - THE ROOTS OF LO TOM

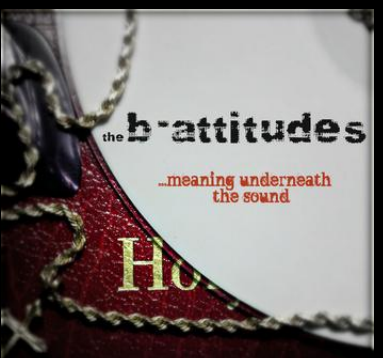
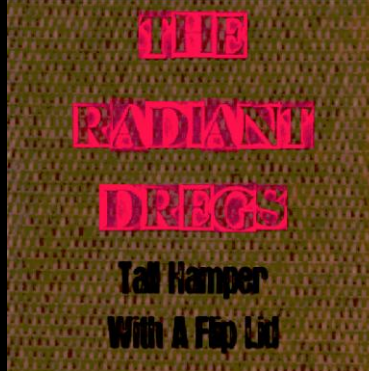
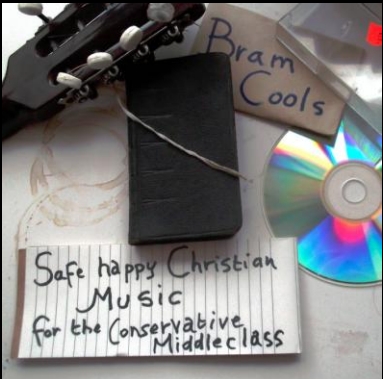
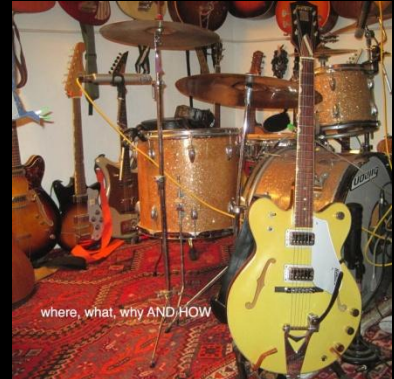
J. GRETZ OF ZAO: THE COST OF VICTORY



PLUS:
2MINUTE
MINOR

DOWN THE LINE

ISSUE 21 - JANUARY 2016



NEVER ENDING ROCK

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NEWS

see downthelinezine.com for these stories and more:

Platoon 1107 releases covers album *Respect is Due*

Help The Prayer Chain release *Shawl* on double vinyl

Opus Zine releases *Twenty Years and Counting* compilation with exclusive Writ on Water, Revolutionary Army of the Infant Jesus, Sam Billen, Caul, etc tracks

The Lead return with new EP *The Lead Again*

Mike Indest releases *Shine Down (4 Track Diaries 2017)*

Dw. Dunphy, Jeff Elbel, Randy Kerkman, and Dan Pavelich release “Everything Goes To Hell” song for charity

Writ on Water releases *A Charcoal Night* EP

Dissident Prophet releases new album *Strange Days*

Aaron & Jesse Sprinkle’s new band Blank Books release *EP1*

Circle of Dust is back. Again.

Retroactive Records releases Mortal’s *Lusis* and *Fathom* on vinyl

Ty Tabor of King’s X to release new solo album *Alien Beans*

New Lee Bozeman EP now out

Champion Leader releases *Hurricane, I*

Hammock releases *Columbus (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*

Punk for the Gospel Benefit Compilation Volume 3 is released

Easter Teeth releases *Truckstop Fear* on CD and cassette

Lo-Fidelity Records to reissue Dead Artist Syndrome’s *Prints of Darkness* on vinyl and CD

Retroactive Records releases all five Barnabas albums on CD

Deliverance to release *The Subversive Kind*

Pants on Fire: A Tribute to The Choir Volume 1

We Bear the Scars: killer new compilation featuring Living Sacrifice, Warlord, and others

THE ORCHARD

by Ellis in the Orchard

Here is a sort of 'best of' list from last year. These were new to me in the last year, not all are from 2017, and Sole's album just came out this year. There were three books that stuck with me in the last few months, they are listed first, and they were immediately engaging.

My Riot: Agnostic Front, Grit, Guts & Glory – Roger Miret with Jon Wiederhorn
Lesser Gods Publishing

The People's History of the United States – Howard Zinn
<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/innapeopleshistory.html>

Society of the Spectacle – Guy Debord

When it comes to music I don't know where to begin. There has been a bunch of artists that I have really liked this past year. These are all worth checking out!

Astronautalis – *Cut the Body Lose*
<https://astronautalis.bandcamp.com/album/cut-the-body-loose>

Sole – *Let Them Eat Sand*
<https://sole.bandcamp.com/album/let-them-eat-sand>

Propagandhi – *Victory Lap*
<https://propagandhi.com/>

Advent – *Pain & Suffering*
<https://bridge9.bandcamp.com/album/pain-suffering>

ZAO – *Pyrrhic Victory*
<https://officialzao.bandcamp.com/album/pyrrhic-victory>

Walter Gross – *Vestige*
<https://waltergross.bandcamp.com/album/vestige>

Dead Cross – *S/T*
<https://deadcross.bandcamp.com/album/dead-cross>

Loone – *River's Our Blood*
<https://loone.bandcamp.com/album/rivers-our-blood>

Here's a few labels that are worth checking out. There are so many great bands on these labels, and the majority of the new music I find comes through these channels:

Black Box Tapes Trading Company - <https://blackboxtapes.bandcamp.com/>

Fake Four Inc. - <https://fakefour.bandcamp.com/>

Get Better Records - <https://getbetterrecords.bandcamp.com/>

Bridge Nine Records - <https://bridge9.bandcamp.com>



ZAO:

**...CATCHING UP WITH
DRUMMER JEFF GRETZ
ABOUT THE BAND, AND THEIR
BLISTERING NEW EP PYRRHIC
VICTORY...**

Interview by Ellis in the Orchard

I think it was back in October when I found out that Zao was releasing another album! I was surprised because they had just released *The Well Intentioned Virus* about a year before, and here they were already announcing the arrival of their new EP. I was stoked, and man, this EP does not disappoint! Zao has been a band just under 25 years now. That is an amazing thing to think about. They have weathered lineup changes, the digital age of music and have solidly remained one of the best bands in the scene for many years. It is no small feat to remain a band that long, but they also continue to release albums that are the best of their career. I honestly had a really difficult time in trying to figure out what to say about Zao. I have been a fan since the beginning, and the history of the band is long and there is so much to talk about, condensing it down to one article was tough.

Zao began as a hardcore band with roots in the Christian hardcore scene. Their mark on the scene is undeniable. Early on Zao had to endure numerous member changes, but it never slowed them down, and the bright side of that was with new members come new influences and sounds. By the time they released their third album their sound was very different, there was a metal edge to the music, and it was exciting and fresh. Zao continued down the path of what we now call 'metalcore', and while I find the label to be very lacking in description, the music is a testament to the unrelenting and unstopping nature of the band. Zao separated themselves from the pack early on, and when stacked next to their peers in the scene, I think Zao continue to evolve and set the bar high for other bands to follow. They are still blazing the trail, and they sound better, heavier and more feral than ever!

As with many bands that got their start in the Christian scene in the 1990's, there has been the ever present questions of "are they/aren't they Christians anymore?" I guess that is not an unusual thing for a band that has roots in the Christian scene. I wanted to be the interviewer to ask questions not related to the issue of spiritual/religious beliefs, but I was also genuinely interested in how it was for Jeff Gretz when he joined the band. Jeff joined Zao in 2005, and at that time, he was the only member who was not a believer. I was stoked to get a few questions to him about being in Zao, the new album, and who he is listening to these days. Definitely click the links, check out their merch and support the band. These guys put out a solid product too, the artwork is always impressive and the packaging is top notch. If you want to check out more history on the band, I highly recommend you get their DVD, *The Lesser Lights of Heaven*. It is filled with over 6 hours of footage, and provides a unique look at the band and their history, with a ton of live footage and interviews as well.

When did you start playing drums, and what got you interested in music and drums specifically?

I started REALLY young. Probably 3 or 4. I barely remember starting. My dad was a drummer so they were always in the house. He never officially taught me, but would show me stuff. I would just watch him and then play along with records.

Do you play any other instruments as well?

I play piano a bit. I play enough bass and guitar to get a point across, but nothing I would do in public. When I was in college I focused on orchestral percussion - so the non-drum side of the percussion family: marimba, xylophone, vibraphone is pretty deep as well.

If my memory & Google are correct, you joined Zao right around 2005, playing drums for them as they toured *The Funeral of God*?

Yeah, I think Stephen Peck (*Funeral of God* drummer) did a handful of tours after *Funeral* came out before he realized touring wasn't for him, so I came in shortly after that record came out and have been here ever since.

What was it like for you, stepping into a pretty established band, and getting sucked right up into the hectic touring schedule, etc.?

It was alright, I was friends with all of the guys in the band even though I hadn't talked to a lot of them in a while because they were always on tour. So, I was surrounded by familiar faces. The touring aspect wasn't totally new to me I had done tours with other bands here and there over the years. Doing a DIY tour can be pretty physically taxing. So even though Zao toured a lot, we were playing nice clubs and staying in hotels. I felt like I was living like a king.

Was *The Fear Is What Keeps Us Here* the first album that you played on?

Yeah, first album for Zao. The first thing I ever recorded with the group was actually our cover of Black Flag's "Black Coffee" that we did for a compilation album. Which I later found out that Dillinger Escape Plan's Black Flag cover on the same album was also Greg Puciato's first recording with THEM. So that compilation (*Black on Black Flag*) actually has 2 "band member debuts" on it.

Is the line-up for this album still you, Dan, Scott, Russ and Martin?

Yeah, same line up. With the exception of Russ getting injured pretty bad and taking some time off from the band

in 2006 right before we recorded *The Fear*, the line-up has been essentially the same since 2005.

Do all the members still live far apart? What is the writing and recording process for you guys like at this point?

Dan, Scott and Marty all live around Pittsburgh, no more than about 20 or so minutes from each other. I am in Brooklyn and Russ is in southern California. Recording hasn't really changed. Even back when we were doing *The Fear* and we were all in the same city, it was a lot of demoing material on our own and then getting together to double check it once the ideas were fleshed out before we went into the studio. So that part hasn't changed. The internet makes it easier. We do a lot of file sharing between us. When it's time, I travel in to Pittsburgh and do the drums for everything, which I JUST got home from doing another 15 songs doing just that, and then people individually go to the studio to do their parts. We all trust each other to not be there watching over the process and everything is pretty much worked out ahead of time, so it's just a matter of putting it down. Shows can be trickier. We don't play a ton. So we have to be careful. It's a lot of scheduling and making sure we can get the right offers to afford to fly Russ and I in.

When *The Well Intentioned Virus* was released it had been 7 years since the last album, *Awake?*, now you guys are firing back in a year, so fast! How did you guys find time to write another 5 songs in just a year!?

When I went to do the drums for *Virus* we had 19 songs ready to go, we knew they all weren't going on the album but since we had the recording booked and the drums mic'd up I just did everything at once. So even though things are released farther apart, the initial recording all happened at once. The only thing that wasn't completed really on these 5 songs were the vocals and mixing. *Virus* came out last December and I think Dan was in the studio in January finishing up the vocals on these 5. Some of the songs on this record and *Virus* actually date back to 2009 or 2010 right after *Awake* came out. Some of the songs I just recorded were written right after I tracked drums for *Virus* so even though I just did them now, some of them are 3 years old already. The plus side of the break is we built up a lot of material so there is a healthy backlog, plus we have time to sit and refine stuff before it hits the public. We never really had that luxury before.

Are you involved in other projects outside of Zao as well?

Yeah. I have a group that is more of a straight forward Rock group called Emanuel and The Fear. We do a lot of stuff with that is more orchestrated out with violins and synths and stuff, and it's pretty melodic, total opposite of Zao. Also

have a record coming out in November with a group called the Knells out of NY. Super prog-y. Instead of one lead singer there are 3 opera singers. Really out there stuff, but kind of chill. Aside from that I do a lot of freelance live/recording session work around NYC.

Wikipedia states that when you joined you were the first outspoken non-Christian in the group? What was that like for you? Was the response from fans and press what you did/didn't expect?

It was weird. I really wasn't outspoken. I just said "I'm not a Christian" which I guess is weird for Zao at the time. But you have to remember that for a long time they were on Solid State/Tooth and Nail. Even if members were not Christian, you didn't say that. There were "rules" or they wouldn't put the record out. Dan used to make up "label explanations" for the songs so they didn't get upset. Essentially he would say "this is what this song is about" even if it wasn't. Otherwise they could refuse to release it. Bad vibes all around to operate in. But they were stuck in a contract that was something like 6 or 7 records deep. I didn't get too much backlash, by that point I think a lot of Zao's fans had sort of made the transition with them. The *Funeral of God* album title really ruffled some feathers in the Christian circles at first and I think by the time I joined that combined with the Ferret records association and everything else, it wasn't really as much of an issue anymore.

I'm curious how you dealt with being a non-believer in a band that got its start and fan base in the Christian industry, do you feel like elaborating on what that was like for you?

Yeah that 5 eras thing is weird. I think that's a bit of a stretch. I would say at most 3. The original Line up. When Dan and Russ joined that was pretty much when the PA contingent came into the fold so that would be two. And I would say *Funeral* and onward is 3. It's weird saying "non-believer" to me because it's not exactly that I am an atheist. I was brought up in a Catholic household, and I absolutely got as far away from the "church" as possible. That really doesn't have any bearing on my personal beliefs about God or Jesus or anything like that. Would I consider myself a Christian in the saved/born-again stance? No. But that is neither here nor there to me. My "I am not a CHRISTIAN" is literally that. I know what Christian means to the people that are asking. In my upbringing, being a Catholic WAS being a Christian. But to go back to what you were saying, the other guys in Zao, Russ, Dan, Scott Marty have all done the same thing to varying degrees in terms of their journey. Their beliefs at 18 are totally different than where they are at 40 and I think for a lot of Zao fans it is the same. The weird thing for us is that the really hardcore Christianity that came from Zao came from people like original singer Eric Reeder and Shawn Jonas and Mic Cox, Roy Goudy, etc. and most of those guys are still in that place. But once Dan joined it changed immediately because he wasn't them. So to an extent, while the history is weird for ME sometimes. It's

also weird for them. But it's what it is. It's complicated. But it is a big part of who Zao is for better and for worse.



Zao is an anomaly as a band in some ways, the band is going into its 25th year and doesn't have any of the original members... I kind of see the band as this ever evolving entity that continues to grow and change, and the music just keeps getting better and better! What can we expect musically from *Pyrrhic Victory*, and can you speak to what the songs are about lyrically? The album title alone is heavy subject matter.

Lyrically in a lot of ways it is on the same course as *The Well-Intentioned Virus* because the songs were written in the same time frame for the most part. Dan is writing about what he HAS been writing about all along, clear back to *Blood and Fire*: his panic attacks, dreams, asking questions about our (humanity's) course through the universe: are we helping? Or are we destroying? Dealing with his transition in his beliefs, why he got there, how he got there, coming to terms with that. And not necessarily making a definitive proclamation but dealing with all of the questions that stuff brings up. Musically, when we were putting *Virus* together we were very careful about keeping a certain flow to the album, so these songs weren't held off because they weren't as good, but more for the fact that they fit together in their own way to us. They are a little more "straightforward" I guess. Not quite as epic in scope. To me these always came across as a little more immediate to me so they made sense as a short EP that had a specific focus or mood. A lot of bands treat an EP as a dumping ground of B or C-list ideas. To us, we like the format of sort of a mini-album. So we never looked at these songs as lesser. We are at the point now where the "not-good" ideas never even get recorded. So if we record it, it is meant to be heard. The

title refers to a Victory but “at what cost?” Is the short term gain worth the long term consequences of it? We kind of play into that with the art between *Virus* and this one, they are part of the same story. The skeleton guy that is feeding the cup to the witch on the stake, we have long talked about “what is in the cup?” and to us it’s “truth”. But, if you accept the truth... is it really what you thought it was? Was it worth it?

Who are some of your favorite bands past and present?

Oh man, I am all over the map. A lot of things from the past still hang in there. I love all the “classics” – Who, Zeppelin, Beatles. Slayer always had a big impact on me growing up and my transition into Metal. I still can dig on that old Slayer stuff. A lot of Jazz. Big Grateful Dead fan (we all are). I have been listening to another favorite for a while a lot lately “The Drift” by Scott Walker. You want a total bum-out of a record? That’s the way to go. It’s pretty peerless in its singular vision of weirdness.

What’s on your turntable / CD player / iPod / phonograph / cassette deck / 8 track right now?

Recently, I really like the new Dead Cross record, the band with Dave Lombardo, Mike Patton, and Justin from the Locust. I will always check out what Neurosis is up to. Haven’t heard the NEWEST Kendrick Lamar record but LOVED *To Pimp A Butterfly* so I have been meaning to check that out. The new War On Drugs record is great. Not ashamed to say I am into the new Arcade Fire record either. For the past year or so I have been obsessed with Judee Sill. She was around in the early late 60’s early 70’s. Essentially she was a drug dealer/addict. Her and her boyfriend got arrested for robbing a bank and while she was in jail decided she was going to be a songwriter. And essentially taught herself music by learning to play organ for the prison church services. She’s real into singing about astral planes. It’s pretty heavy stuff.

Are there plans to tour coming up?

We just got back from some dates in Virginia, North Carolina and Harrisburg, PA. We’re heading down to Texas in December, playing Houston on our own and then meeting up with two shows in Austin and Dallas with our old friends in Living Sacrifice. Just starting to plot out what the plan is in 2018. Still some areas we haven’t hit in the past few years that we need to get to.

Below are links to check out for band merch, etc. Zao is keeping it true as well, while many bands rely on nostalgia to justify charging ridiculous amounts for a new record, Zao is keeping it real and keeping it affordable for their fans. That is something that, I for one, greatly appreciate!

<https://holymountainprinting.myshopify.com/collections/zao>
<https://officialzao.bandcamp.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/ZAO.Official/>
<https://holymountainprinting.myshopify.com/collections/zao>

Also, I would be remiss to not mention Matt Kerley, the awesome artist that the band have used artwork from on their last two albums. He has a webstore that you can check out and support him by buying merch! One of my favorite things about Zao was how they handle the visual aspects of their merch and their releases. They always seem to convey a pretty deep message via the photos and artwork that adorn their releases.

<http://mattkerley.bigcartel.com/>



2Minute Minor = Hardcore Punk Done Beautifully

Hardcore punk in the 80s was a big deal. Bands like Minor Threat, Youth of Today, and Gorilla Biscuits were touring like crazy and had more loyalty in their following than any music genre could ever hope for. Hardcore punk's not dead by a long shot. 2Minute Minor from Chicago is living proof of that. I met Wiley at Audiofeed Festival the last couple summers and have found the tuneage to my liking, hence this interview.

2Minute Minor play fast and furious, with an entire album over in 17 minutes. But what a great 17 minutes it is, with the gang vocals as good as they get. I am reminded of the energy of bands like 25 Ta Life, Warzone, and Slapshot. Wiley also lets his core beliefs and PMA (Positive Mental Attitude) influence his writing. If this is your thing, go check them out at: <http://2minuteminor.bandcamp.com/>

If you like what you hear, you can purchase their "...A Goon's Best Friend" 7", CD or cassette (yep, I picked one up myself!) at: <http://2minuteminor.bigcartel.com/>

This album received a 5 out of 5 review in Indie Vision Music in July, and so it should. This band delivers the goods. --Doug Peterson

You sing in three bands: The Blamed, October Bird of Death, and 2 Minute Minor. The Blamed has been around for a while. Of the other two bands, what is the difference and how did these bands originate?

I moved to Chicago about 4 years ago from Michigan; This is when it all began. The whole reason we are having the interview.

Well, I worked out in the same gym as Darren Davick, guitar player of October Bird of Death. Darren played guitar previously in a band called Ballydowse. I asked him several times a week for about a year if he would play guitar in a band that I would put together. After asking over and over he finally said "Yes." That is how October Bird of Death was born.

Fast forward to October Bird of Death recording our EP with Bryan Gray from The Blamed. Bryan seemed to like my vocals and asked me if I would be interested in doing The Blamed reunion at Audiofeed 2016. I agreed and we have played a

hand full of shows since then and we are in the starting phases of recording The Blamed's new album. We are not sure if it will be an EP or a full length yet.

2Minute Minor was born because my vision for October Bird of Death was more of an Oldschool punk project. The members we invited to play with us had other ideas. We compromised on a Progress type Punk Project with Oldschool Punk Elements. I'm glad we did. The tunes are great. Although it's not my style of choice at times I still have a great deal of fun making music with my Octobird family.

I decided to start 2Minute Minor so I could be doing the music I was really passionate about with a message I really wanted to get across with no edits. 2Minute Minor really feels like my band. Like it's apart of me. I love yelling in October Bird of Death and The Blamed but I only feel like the front man in those bands. It's a great honor - don't get me wrong. I'm just very thrilled about 2Minute Minor and the band's future.

I am primarily interested in 2 Minute Minor for this interview. What kind of band is 2 Minute Minor? What is unique about this band?

2Minute Minor is a Oldschool Style Positive Hardcore Punk Band. Let me explain what that means...

My friend and guitar player in Anti-World System Mike Perlmütter said "What is up with all these new hardcore bands? It's not even hardcore. By the time you and I are gone no one will really know what real hardcore is."

In that moment, I thought it would be good to try and restore and give homage to Oldschool hardcore punk the best we knew how. 2Minute Minor tries to keep the Oldschool hardcore punk flavor, also, being much inspired by the Skinhead youth scene and Skinhead Hardcore Punk sound of the 80s. We give a positive message first started by Bad Brains in the Hardcore Punk Scene. Using PMA as a guideline to our mindset.

What other noteworthy bands has 2 MM shared the stage with?

To be honest, we have only been playing out for a little while now. Every band we play with holds a place in our heart. Our favorite shows are in basements and very small clubs. We love the intimate setting. We have loved sharing a bill with Decline & New Heart.

What bands were influential to 2 Minute Minor's sound? The gang vocals are one of the stand out features of the band.

We are heavily inspired by Warzone, Minor Threat, Infest, Uniform Choice, Chain Of Strength, Breakdown, Slapshot, Bad Brains, Cro-Mags, Inside Out, and Black Flag.

I really always loved the Oldschool sound. I'm also a sucker for Youth Crew Hardcore and love the gang vocals. Especially, Youth of Today, Gorilla Biscuits, Bold and Side By Side.

Let's hear about a couple 2 MM songs off your debut release.

The song, "Follow Your Own Path," on our EP: *...A Goon's Best Friend* is about doing what is right for you personally. Following the Path you are on at the time and learning along the way. As a Christian and being Straight Edge, I've picked both those things up along my journey in life. Two things that are very, very important to me. Yet, I have not always been this way. I've had to learn for myself that those two things work for me in the best ways possible to better my life and soul. I would never push those on to people. That would be a shame. We as a band want people to find what really works for them and to remember where they are and where they started on their paths. This song is about truly embracing your path and letting people embrace theirs.

"Change My Life" is about my personal choice to become Straight Edge and the positive effects it has brought my life. I have a very addictive personality so being sober is a huge gift for me. I was once a barley functioning alcoholic and I am so blessed to call myself sober and Straight Edge.

Can we get a sneak peak of some of the songs being written for the next 2MM album?

We have a bunch of songs written for the new album titled: *Blood On Our Front Stoop*. The title track is a true story about a incident where our guitar player had a shooting on his front stoop and blood was everywhere. His wife called the cops and they took for ever to get there and acted like it was a joke of sorts. His wife had to literally scrub blood off their front stoop at 5am in Chicago so their kids would not see it before they went to school in the morning.

We have a track called "Working Class Tried-and-True:" The song is about working class and Skinhead pride. It's also about the difference between Skinheads and Boneheads. A lot of people we run into think Skinheads are Racist. We have to clear that up and assure them that the tradition Skins were not racist at all. Boneheads are racist. This song is about those differences.

You are Straight Edge. Are there other band members that are also Straight Edge? Why have you chosen this life-style?

I am the only one that claims Straight Edge. Our drummer does not smoke, do drugs or drink. He does not claim edge but he technically is in his own way. The rest of the band does drink occasionally. None of them are heavy drinkers at all. Both our guitar players have families and their families come first before anything. I personally chose to be Edge because a good friend of mine from back in Michigan (John Parr) has been Edge for as

long as I've known him. I've known him probably 15 years now. He always had a good head on his shoulders and always seemed a little happier in a way than most. So many times I have tried to be sober, I finally gave it up to God truly and fully. I've been sober now for almost 4 years and it's a huge blessing and gift. It is what really works for me. Like I said I have an addictive personality. Now I can use my addictive personality for positive things like music, relationships, and ministry in my own ways. In "Follow Your Own Path," the song on our album, we all embrace each other's differences and use them in our songs and lives. Our message is really about being true to you and be honest with yourself about what works in life to make you a better person. Different things work for different people.

What are your favorite bands? Why?

As a band, we all have different influences musically and that's what I love. It's a little part of each of us in each song. We just wanna give homage to Oldschool hardcore punk. We are not reinventing the wheel. We are just trying to keep Oldschool style hardcore punk around for a little longer. It's our passion.

You have a video of the band promoting the drink LaCroix. How did that come about?

Being Straight Edge and once an alcoholic (some say always an alcoholic), I choose not to be bound by alcohol anymore. Drinking LaCroix at shows in bars really helps me a lot. Once upon a time I would always have a alcoholic drink in my hand. Today, I always have a LaCroix in my hand. Cook County, where we live in Chicago, decided to do a "Sugar Tax," 12 cents every ounce. They accidentally put it on LaCroix, a sparkling water that has no sugar or sweeteners in it. We decided to make a song and video about the joys of being sober and drinking LaCroix. It's all in fun. We had a lot of fun making the video "Soda Tax."

You kind of like tattoos. Tell me about your love for tats.

I got my first tattoo to give my Mother thanks for giving her life for me. She was diagnosed with Cancer when I was born and refused to get Chemo until after I was born. I got it on my chest. The year she died and her name: 19Karen Lee85. I remember seeing Mike Herrera of MxPx on a 7ball Magazine at the Christian book store back when I was a kid with my grandpa. He was wearing a tank top and you could see all of his visible tattoos. It memorized me. I told my Grandpa that one day I would look like that, he laughed and smiled.

We have talked about All Lives Matter, and we both agree this is an unnecessary reaction to the issue of racism that our police are not always taking serious. Let's hear your thoughts on this.

I personally think All Lives Matter is a weak attempt at saying what it wants. I understand what it's trying to do. I just don't agree with the way it's done. I feel that Black Lives Matter is a very important message. All Lives Matter seems to take away what Black people have faced and been through. I do think that All Lives Matter don't get me wrong. But I also think BLM is a needed movement. Yes, it has been tainted by a select few. Just like anything that is good. As humans we tend to ruin all things that are good. Or at least we try to. What I'm trying to say is personally I think BLM is a movement that is very powerful and much needed. The struggles that black people face and faced in the past is gut-wrenching and very much real.

I'm not a huge fan of Police to be honest. I've never really had a good interaction yet really with a Police officer. That being said, this is where I'm at in my personal journey. I'm very conflicted. Seeing what Police get away with makes my head spin and my stomach turn. As a Christ Follower it's hard for me to hate anyone. I guess I have to say I hate the abuse of power. Police have way too much power in my opinion. Again, this is where I stand today in my journey. I'm open to discussion and even a change of heart about a lot of things. We should be evolving our selves and our minds. Knowledge is indeed power. The things I see and have personally witnessed, as well as, encountered point me in the direction of not trusting Police officers. We talk about this issue a little in the new album that's not out yet.

If you could envision the ultimate cool punk band, comprised of people still alive, who would be in this band?

As a Punk Rock Fan, I have to say that band already exists. It's called Descendents. Ha-Ha. But if I had to put a super group together I would pick:

*Milo Aukerman (Descendents) on Vocals.

*Earl Hudson (Bad Brains) on Drums.

*Tie between Greg Ginn (Black Flag) on Lead Guitar and Vinnie Stigma (Agnostic Front) on Lead Guitar.

*Tim Armstrong (Op Ivy/Rancid) on 2nd Guitar.

*Mike Watt (Minutemen) on Bass.

I understand you do not like metal much. Why is that? What styles of music do you like and why do you like them?

Ha-Ha, well, I am amazed and really do love Iron Maiden's music so much. I can appreciate the talent it takes to be in a good metal band. It's just not for me. I have been in a metal band before. I was also in a punk band at the same time. I just gave all my love and energy to the punk project. The 2 bands I was in shared the same guitar player. He loved metal. So he was in the punk project to help me out and I did the metal project to help him out. I lasted about a year

in the metal band. I just felt like I could not give my everything to it. I really did try. It's just not my passion.

The styles of music I'm really into is Punk, Hardcore, Hardcore Punk, Oi!, Folk Punk, Dark Folk and believe it or not Worship Music. One of my favorite artists of all time and influences is Tom Waits.

What do you want to accomplish with 2Minute Minor?

Personally, I think we are accomplishing what we want. We want to make music that pays homage to the hardcore punk sound. We want to play smaller shows and put out albums. We are very realistic and don't want to make a career out of music. This is our hobby. We all have lives outside of the band and family is always number one for us all. We consider Chicago the bands home and we have a long journey ahead of us just to break into the scene fully.

If someone approached you and said that punk and Christianity do not mix, how would you respond?

Well, first off, Christianity is my personal belief. I'm a follower of Christ and he has transformed my life. Punk Rock has done the same but in a completely different way.

Punk Rock can be a sound. It can be a way of life. It can be an attitude. It can be a label. Punk Rock is all about going against the World. So is Christianity (Real Christianity. Not Racist white suburban-Starbucks-political-mega church-TV evangelical money pusher-Christianity).

You know the Christianity that's about feeding and clothing the poor, treating your neighbors as yourself, pouring out True Love Christianity. I most definitely think you can be Punk Rock and a real follower of Christ. But in the end, labels don't really matter. It's all how you live your life and treat people. Relationships are all we have. We as people can agree or argue until we are blue in the face. None of that really matters. It's all about our hearts truly.

Is there something you want people to know about 2MM so that the band gets their proper respect?

We are not looking for free respect. We understand that it is earned. All we want to do is make hardcore punk records and play them out in this great town of Chicago that we live in. Yes, the town has its ups and downs, it's problems and it's greatness.... We just wanna YELL about everyday issues and the passions in our hearts.

Thank you so much for the thought provoking questions. PMA.

Doug's note: This interview was done several months ago. A lot has happened with 2MM since then. So here is a bit of an update.

What has 2 Minute Minor been up to in the last few months? Tell us about your new guitarist?

We did get a new guitar player. We are honored to have Michael C. Perlmütter, formally of Crashdog, Headnoise, and Anti-World System, join us on 2nd guitar. Zach, Virgil, Noam and myself are spending time teaching him the new songs for the new record and he's sounding great.

2Minute Minor has been working on a new album. Let's hear about it.

2Minute Minor is releasing its 2nd album: *Blood on Our Front Stoop* through Indie Vision Music and Zap Records. Brandon of IVM has been so kind and accommodating. We are a different style for him. He's mainly put out pop punk stuff. So we are both learning from each other. Dave from Zap is always great. Zap is our family label for sure. We will be releasing the 2nd 2MM album through IVM & Zap. We plan on recording it in Michigan with one of my really good friends Jeff Hostetler of Drink Their Blood! We hope to have it out in April. Thanks for the follow up. Nothing but respect.

All 2MM tapes, CDs, shirts, patches, and vinyl can be found at: <http://2minuteminor.bigcartel.com/>

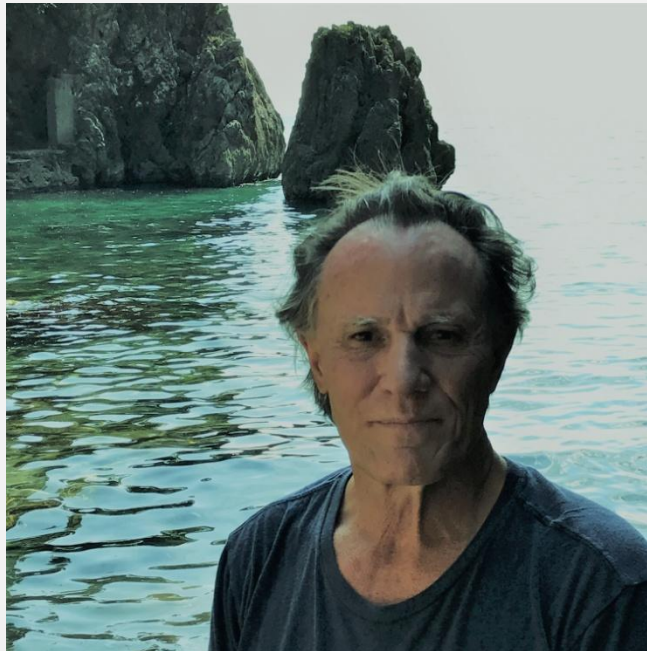


DOWN THE LINE INTERVIEW WITH FRANK SCHAFER

by Doug Peterson

Frank Schaffer is a name I grew up with. I knew of his reputation mostly from being Francis Schaeffer's zealous son, who carried on the evangelical tradition with books and films such as "How Should We Then Live?" Even from my teen years, I recall reading about Frank and his mudslinging at the evangelical church as a conservative i.e. Wittenburg Door magazine. Well, fast-forward that thirty-some years later and Frank is still slinging mud at the evangelical church, only as a social progressive. I picked up on the fact that he was not the same person as he was back in the 80s when I read "Portofino" and "Saving Grandma," two books that offer a fun insider's perspective of what it is like growing up in an evangelical home.

Frank is not one for soft diplomacy and feel-good sentiments. And he doesn't back down from a fight. He says it how he sees it. His lens is a unique one, given he grew up with many of the cats he publically chastises. Our world needs more people like Frank Schaffer, who is firmly committed to voicing concerns and taking hypocrisy and intolerance to task. He also does it with style and sometimes humor. Without further adeau.....Frank Schaeffer!



It started with art. In this case my first novel *Portofino*. After I wrote that work of humor, it occurred to me that the humor was at the expense of the evangelical religion I'd grown up on. I never set out to write a satire. It isn't one but many evangelicals that took it as such. So in a way I was divorced from the community without setting out to leave at first. My head was already in another place. And my art, through writing, took on a life of its own before I had put together any sort of coherent alternative plan. One sister of mine broke contact after the novel was published. We're talking again these days. Later, she said she over reacted. As for the rest of the community the NY Times got it right when they said evangelical leaders regarded me as a "traitorous prince" fleeing and then renouncing so-called evangelical royalty. The truth is, this is so long ago now for me that I have very little emotion about it these days. And Post-Trump and the white evangelical vote for Trump I am just so grateful that I made another life for myself. These folks are truly alien to me now. To not be liked by the likes of a Franklin Graham or a Jerry Falwell Jr. these days hurts about as much (and for the same reasons) as not being liked by the neo-Nazis.

You wrote *Sex, Mom, and God: How the Bible's Strange*

***Take on Sex Led to Crazy Politics and How I Learned to Love Women (and Jesus) Anyway*. This title is revealing about your agony over the entrapments of fundamentalist faith. In this book you describe the inerrancy of Scripture as: "...everything it says is true, historically, geologically, scientifically, sociologically, scientifically, and every other way — then you have signed onto a Bronze Age myth. And one of the primary tenets of that myth is a misogynistic view of women, and also a view of gay people, which puts them outside of the mainstream of just human existence."** Not a lot of evangelicals were ready to hear that in 2011 and not many can hear this now. Could you expand on how you feel about inerrancy of the text?

I read *Crazy For God* with much intrigue. The dismantling of your evangelical posturing came around the time of your father passing away. You mentioned your father becoming more fiery about inerrancy of scripture, even at the cost of tearing apart family. When you began your journey towards re-examining your theology and politics, what was that like for you? And secondly, did you feel "jumping ship" was a betrayal to the people who influenced or supported you while you were fervently evangelical?

It is a question that is moot once one decides, as I did long ago, that the Bible is not only not in any sense the "Word of God" but in fact denies basic common sense about any or all creators. The God-of-the-Bible is a lot less kind than I am, and I'm a jerk sometimes. What I mean is that in 65 years I've gone from being a harsh teen father to a pretty good grandfather. I learned that I'd never burn a child forever for getting some idea about me wrong (theology) or demand that they "believe" in me. Sorry, but the Bible is interesting but backwards. When I look at the universe and the evolution of empathy within us, the idea that this little dumb Middle-Eastern "god" is just silly. So inherency is moot for me. Besides, there is no such thing as a "book" called the Bible as American Protestants think of it. There is just a collection of texts that the authors had no idea at all would ever be read as a whole, as if it's a novel with a story arc.

Also in *Sex, Mom & God* you write, "The history of theology (Christian or otherwise) is the history of people desperately trying to fit the way things actually are into the way their holy books say they should be." This is a more humble approach at coming to understand the tradition with all the follies and atrocities committed. Where is the hope for holding onto a faith stemmed from a sacred text?

None. What "sacred" texts? If faith exists it is because of the witness of our own empathy, the sacred text of our hearts, and the wonder and beauty of the universe. The books are interesting literature but tell us nothing about God. For instance I love the way preachers say things like "As Jesus says in..." What??? You mean the guy who wrote down what he says Jesus said..." Right? Not the same thing at all. All hearsay. If you want to read God's book, look up and out and in. You are the book. So is all of creation.

When Michele Bachman, a Reconstructionist, was running as a Republican Candidate in 2011, you said in an on-air interview, "The religious right that I was part of is fundamentally anti-American. They hate this country. They wrap themselves in the flag, but they hate America as it is: the America that embraces gay people, is multicultural, is a homogeneous society that seeks to

incorporate all races and ethnic creeds into its culture. The America they love is the, quote, "Christian America" that they keep harping back to, that people like Rick Perry, Michele Bachmann, Sarah Palin, George W. Bush, etc., all want to take us back to. But it's an America that never existed and certainly doesn't now."

So... here we are now, years later, and we have Reconstructionists in the White House. I have heard some people express that, in time, the gap between other people rooted in faith and the evangelicals will widen, and evangelicals will be seen as those who bought out to a party line. Could you comment?

Yes. Trump is the end of the line. The myth is exploding. Let's just take all the old time claims people like Dad made for the Reformed tradition. The person of Christ et al. Well, now the mask is off. 83 percent of white evangelicals voted for a man who clearly hates everything Jesus is said to have said. And he's in bed with the type of Christians—say Ralph Reed—that my father and most other evangelicals even a generation ago would have called opportunistic flakes and con artists. So even by the old standard of what the gospel is now, we have an Ayn Rand gospel of prosperity not only in the White House but in J. Osteen's fake Jesus-wants-you-rich version of "Take up your cross and follow me" gospel... Well the charade is over!

I was having a conversation with a friend of mine who still relates to Jesus as his biggest inspiration in his life, and it emanates through him quite authentically. He mentioned watching one of your latest video blogs where you speak about Evangelicals who support Trump. In his

perspective you lumped white Evangelicals in with card-carrying Republicans, which is not altogether the case. I might be an exception, but most of the Evangelicals I know are educated, salt-of-the-earth people who think through the issues, and some are actually more progressive in their praxis than the liberals I know. Is there some way that a more clear distinction can be made than to lump white Evangelicals as those that voted in Trump and have a literalist view of scriptures, which is not altogether true?



I often say I am NOT lumping all evangelicals together as Trump supporters. Just check out both my videos on FB and also my TV News comments on MSNBC etc. That said, evangelicals who are worried about their image should start a movement to question and challenge people like Jerry Falwell Jr., Franklin Graham, Ralph Reed et al. Their problem is that it is "these guys not me." When only 19 percent of one's group didn't vote for Trump according to the polls, it's not a generalization to speak of "evangelicals voting for Trump." So sure there's a wide array of believers. But if I were still in the evangelical movement I'd be speaking even more loudly about the traitors to Jesus who now lead the political wing of that movement. They didn't just vote for Trump, they—unlike, say, many Wall Street leaders—are the last people to still defend his most cruel and evil actions.

Jerry Falwell Jr., one of Donald Trump's evangelical advisers, on Sunday defended the president's remarks that "many sides" were to blame for the [violence at a white nationalist rally in Virginia](#), saying "he has inside information that I don't have. I don't know if there were historical purists there who were trying to preserve some statutes. But he had inside information that I didn't have," said Falwell, the president of Liberty University in Virginia, [on ABC's This Week](#). Franklin Graham defended Donald Trump from critics blaming him for the deadly Charlottesville, Virginia riots that occurred over the weekend. Graham, instead, said that the blame is on Satan.

With leaders like this, evangelicals need no enemies.

I assume you have some familiarity with the political writer Chris Hedges, who identifies as an anarchist and a Presbyterian minister. If you and Chris Hedges were to meet over coffee or a couple drinks, what would you find some agreement on and where would you lock horns?

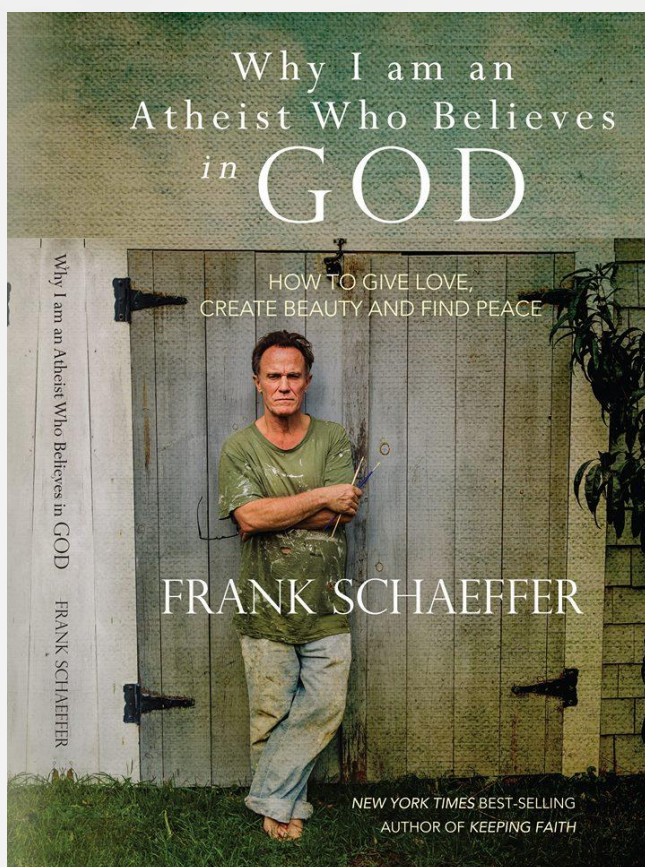
Chris and I have exchanged friendly emails. I admire him. We agree on a lot. I guess I regard his view of the evils of all things American these days as too farfetched. I'd ask what the alternatives are. I regard America as a mixed bag and am more of the mind that the good can sometimes prevail. I'm less worried about evil on Wall Street for instance. I think there is a HUGE difference between the Democratic Party and the Republicans. Republicans in Congress back

Trump's meanness, not just on immigration but the entire social safety net. Compassion is out! Codling white privilege is in!

Republicans hate the social safety net. They believe that a society without economic incentives—in other words a society where if you need help you're on your own—leads to economic stagnation. They equate what they call "freebees" -- medical care for all and the entire safety net from Medicare to Social Security, let alone paying off student loans -- with the removal of important "incentives." Yet the success of some of the wealthiest and happiest

countries in the world, from Germany to Denmark, has proven that decency, compassion and fairness work. And Republicans aren't consistent either. It's "To hell with the needy!" ... until the Republicans need something. Both of the major American parties are NOT "the same." One wants to destroy the Earth, the other doesn't. One cares about ordinary people, the other doesn't. One is striving for the common good, the other party is striving to make the rich richer and the Earth be damned.

The Democratic Party is no more the "same" as the Trump/Republican Party than were the Allied coalition that defeated the Nazis, the "same" as the Nazis and their Axis allies!



In one of your God trilogy books you wrote about how your father would stop his sermon mid-stream and take you down to the furnace room of the church to give you a spanking if you misbehaved. I also went through that experience growing up. To this day I still cringe when I smell an old church basement like the one I got whacked in.

Actually this was true, but not for me. As I recall I recounted how Dad did this with one of my sisters. But the point remains: the entire "way" of so many evangelical child "care" methods reeks of violence and threat.

This experience may be irrelevant to most readers. But I think the fact we can look back at an event from decades ago (such as spanking) and thank our lucky stars that we

are mostly no longer there is an indication that we are getting a bit more mature in retrospect. What do you think we are doing today that hopefully in 20 years from now, we will just shake our heads over and say, "How did we ever think that was ok?"

The whole sale of turning kids over to screens, to a mediated relationship with nature via the Internet. This is going to have huge unintended consequences.

Amongst more conservative Christians, there is a strong current of the end of the world and the rapture. In more historically rooted faith traditions, there is an adherence to God bringing the world to a place of being healed, which envisions God's restorative work. Can you speak about this?

Well of course, from my perspective, something like the inerrancy question... to put it mildly these issues aren't keeping me up at night! Bluntly it's all nonsense. If any creator's actions depend on us getting our ideas about that creator right, then he, she, or it is an idiot. I care for 3 of my 5 grandchildren every day. My relationship with them is unconditional. It has to do with love. And I'm just this guy...

In *Patience With God* you bring up a fascinating response to Western Christianity's need for certainty with your disclosure of apothatic theology, or the theology of not knowing. In the Evangelical and even most Catholic settings, we tend to shy away from the mystical approach. Can you elaborate a bit on the apothatic approach and how it might be healthier in our understanding of how God might operate amongst creation?

I learned something about this on a visit to Mt. Athos. The monastic tradition at Mount Athos dates back to AD 800 and perhaps even earlier. The Holy Mountain is not a mountain at all but actually one of three rocky peninsulas that (on a map) look like a three-fingered hand sticking into the sea. All coming and going by land to the Athonite "finger" of this "hand" is prohibited. Only boats service the peninsula, and traffic is highly controlled. No one enters without written permission. No one just drops by.

The monks' traditions are rooted in the monastic movements that evolved along with the very beginnings of Christianity, and most especially with St. Anthony the Great

and the other desert fathers. Saint Anthony (c. 251 – 356) is known as the "Father of All Monks." In fact, "The Holy Mountain" is the last surviving outpost of the Byzantine Empire that is still ruled from Constantinople (Istanbul) by the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church. In that sense Athos is not part of modern Greece or even part of the modern world. In that sense it is the last outpost of the old Eastern Roman Empire (something I'll explain more fully in another chapter). Be that as it may, St. Anthony would feel at home there. The rest of us— perhaps not so much.

What surprised me about some of the monks I talked to was they approached theology more like agnostics. I found this confusing. Wasn't the monks' liturgical form of religion very old-fashioned? Didn't the old ways always equal fundamentalism? Wasn't the history of our faith a steady decline from old-time religion to modern liberalism? How could a rule of life so strict that when a bell rang you had to stop eating as if your food had suddenly become poisonous, be open minded as well? Nevertheless—a hefty dose of Athonite misogyny, ancient liturgical trappings and strict diet aside—some of the monks I talked to accelerated a thought process in me that affects the daily life I share with my grandchildren today. And this thought process is the opposite of most versions of religious (or for that matter, secular) fundamentalisms.

The monks seemed to offer another way, a way where there are no so-called right beliefs per se, because there is no ultimate confidence in one's own ability to draw perfect conclusions. Who we *are*, not what we *say* we believe, is what counted to them. At best, what we hold to be most true is never more than a hunch. This sense of our limits isn't rooted in some sort of false humility but rests on a belief that we are not only imperfect but evolving. In other words, I was encountering the open and searching approach to spirituality loosely labeled *apophatic theology*.

Apophatic theology holds that the divine is ineffable and recognized only when it is felt and then lived. It's not about "Truth" because truth is fickle and depends on perception. The emphasis is on experiencing what are called the "energies of God," not on trying to *describe* a real or imagined God (or gods) or His, Her, or Its character. Theology is downgraded and the direct experience of beauty is upgraded. Something of this is captured by Bishop Kallistos Ware in *The Orthodox Church* when he writes: "In



order to live within Tradition, it is not enough simply to give intellectual assent to a system of doctrine; for Tradition is far more than a set of abstract propositions — it is a life, a personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit.” This way of seeing spirituality as a life rather than as a belief has other applications. For instance, whatever the facts of brain chemistry or evolutionary psychology are, we tend to feel how we feel about our own personhood. We *feel like* there is a “me” in there looking out and brain chemistry or evolutionary psychology that debunks personhood be damned. In other words an apophatic perspective gives proper regard to *actual life*, not just to *words about life*. It opens the door to embracing often conflicted paradoxes as the best description of our *actual experience of life*. It opens the door to seeing that sometimes poetry and art, music and movies can tell the truth about reality as convincingly as science, albeit with a different voice.

This apophatic worldview directly influences the way I relate to those I love. Bluntly: my conflicted and inexperienced embrace of apophatic perspectives on life and the art of living has helped me transition from being a certainty addict (who tended to believe he was always right) to embracing imperfection and thus relaxing (a bit). And the apophatic approach—where actual experience outweighs theory—is also where most of us as parents, teachers, or grandparents find truth. We experience actual life and actual children and soon revise our ideas. We even change our minds.

What are three books and three musical albums that have meant a lot to you in the last decade?

Books:

John Adams Paperback by David McCullough

We Go to the Gallery (Dung Beetle Reading Scheme 1a)
Hardcover by Miriam Elia

The Last Empress: A Novel Paperback by Anchee Min

Music:

Loves Me...Loves Me Not... Hybrid SACD – DSD
by Camilla/Gluck & Mozart Tilling (Artist),
Ranieri Calzabigi (Composer), Lorenzo Da Ponte
(Composer)

Culcha Vulcha by Snarky Puppy

21st Century Breakdown by Green Day

You have a reputation for stirring up stuff online. You blog about issues that gets under your skin. That must take an absorbent of time and energy. What do you do to unwind or

decompress?

Before I write or blog, I paint. Check out my art site. But after my morning work—I start at 3AM—I knock off at about 10 and spend the rest of the day caring for Lucy, 9, Jack 7, Nora, 3. I’m with a child all day. Talk about pets lowering blood pressure! I’m not a 65-year-old old fart, I’m a very relaxed young mom most of the day.

I think it is mostly true, though there are certainly a lot of people for whom this is not, that we tend to learn from our younger zeal and inexperienced scope of life. If you could time-travel back to revisit yourself in your twenties, what kind of conversation would your older self now have with the young Frankie Schaeffer? What would you say to the “younger you?”

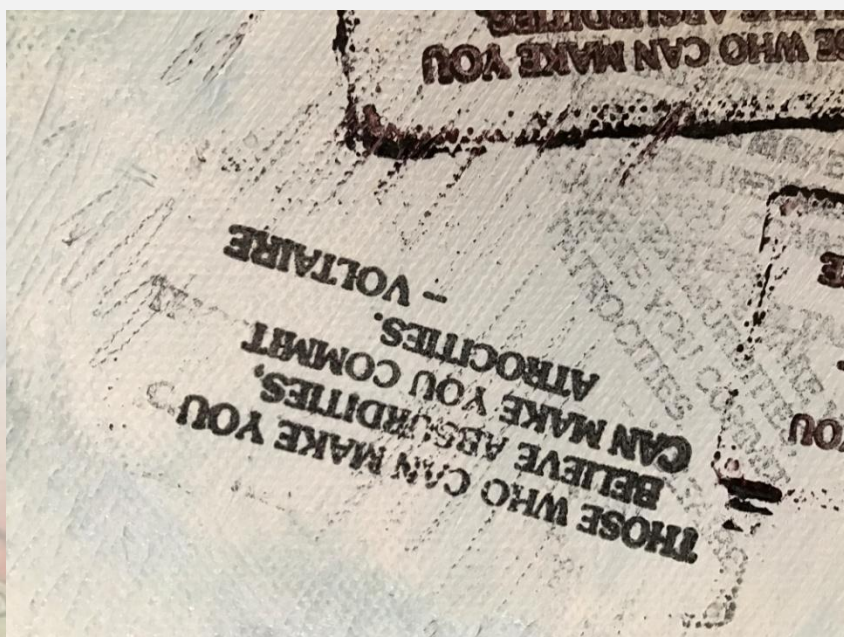
I'd only try to say one thing because I know that it is the key to wisdom: Frank, know this: You'll change your mind. Everything that seems so sure now will change. You'll grow. So don't think that the person you'll be is the one in your head now. I won't predict how you'll change but I know you will. What younger people don't get is the journey aspect of life. That's why some younger couples get divorced too fast for instance. They don't know that everything takes far longer to work out than they imagined. It is a long, LONG path!

This concludes the interview. You may check out Frank’s blogs at: <http://www.frankschaeffer.com/index.html>

Also, for the latest blog from Frank, go here:

<https://frankschaefferblog.com>

Finally, if you like what you have read here, go get some of his books, either at the library or Amazon. I’ve read a few of them and I have learned a lot. –Doug Peterson



Robert Jeffress and Donald Trump

...an opinion on the need for separation between church and state...

by: Ellis in the Orchard

I wrote this back in August and just filed it away. It was in reference to an article I was reading about Pastor Robert Jeffress and Donald Trump (article link found below if interested). I filed this away figuring it would be relevant in the future, and I think it is. It's a serious time to be alive. It is also revealing to watch the religious base condone some pretty destructive stuff in the political world. It reminds me of a sign I saw at a protest, it said something to the effect of: "The only wall we need to build is the wall between church and state."

Wars and rumors of war... doesn't it go something like that? Since when is it okay for Robert Jeffress to speak on behalf of God and give Donald Trump the green light to bomb North Korea? Why is Robert Jeffress even a voice on the national stage? There are a myriad of issues going on in this news article that the article doesn't address. The article, taken at face value, has already concluded that Robert Jeffress has clout because he's a mega-church pastor and he's on Trump's spiritual advisory board. That is no reason that we should trust him, as a matter a fact, it is the reason we should distrust him and run him out of the public eye and public policy.

If the Bible is true, and what Jesus claimed is true, there are no alternatives to His words, and there is no justification for Robert Jeffress or the sycophants that support him. I am talking about what Jesus said in the New Testament, not what the God of the Old Testament did. If we are being honest, Old Testament God loved war, wiping woman, children, men, and animals out in mass numbers, all for His glory we've been told. I guess that is another conversation. The Christ spoke of something different than what had come before, and not only did He talk different, but he demonstrated and lived that difference as well. If I'm stacking morals against the story of Jesus Christ and the person of Robert Jeffress, the two are in conflict with each other.

Jesus was not a pacifist, but he did have Peter sheath his sword when Peter was going to defend him. He willingly was arrested and taken away, beaten, whipped, crucified and stabbed with a spear, and he was innocent. Not one time did He physically defend himself. Take it is the infallible word of God, or take it as a good moral story, but the I don't see anything in that story that condones war and acts of aggression. Jesus said if someone hits you, turn and

offer them the other cheek too. Jesus said give from your need, Jesus said not to seek glory here on earth, but to store treasures in another place by being human and looking out for our neighbors as we would ourselves. My neighbors are the humans that span the globe, not just those around me physically. We are all one humane race, we are divided by flags and borders and these corrupt politicians and pastor/priests who serve the interests of the State and themselves.

If Jesus is real, He doesn't need Robert Jeffress. Robert Jeffress defended Donald Trump's leaked audio admission of sexually assaulting women. Robert Jeffress, a man who defends Donald Trump's bigotry, misogyny, oppressive patriarchal views, and an ego that is only rivaled by his love

of money. Everything in Donald Trump's life screams money, he loves it, talks about it and worships it. He is very open about it. Jesus said the love of money was the root of all evil... not some evil, not a bit of evil, but ALL evil. Robert Jeffress condones and supports that love of money. Robert Jeffress presides over the longest running mega-church, a new campus for his church that was a cool \$128 million, he says gays are "filthy", Mormonism is a cult (different religion, gotta be a cult), oh, and he doesn't like Muslims either. He gives his followers financial advice and tells

them to use their money as an investment, 'invest financially in the 128 million dollar renovation, and store your treasure in Heaven.'

This story may be out of the 24 hour news spin cycle for now, but it will come back up. I don't see religious 'leaders' giving the regime in Washington the wink for waging war as a normal thing at all. I don't think it should be normal, I don't think it should go unnoticed. Bombing North Korea to satisfy the ego of madman only kills innocent people. Sanctions affect the population of countries who have zero say in their own lives due to a repressive regime. The repressive regime here in the United States has us believing that this is good and patriotic, but it isn't. War kills innocent people, period. War is business. The United States loves pre-emptive war, but there is no justification for that in my mind. There are more serious issues in this country than North Korea... and beyond that, isn't there a verse about "Thou shalt not murder?"

<http://wapo.st/2CXNfyg>





The Roots of Lo Tom And How Amy Started The Whole Shit Storm

--Doug Peterson

Lo Tom is indie rock made in a time when pop music is giving rock the throw down. Lo Tom has enough geek-factor in its musical compositions to be both cool and pleasantly complicated. Nowadays, the Christian indie rock scene is comparable to a worn-out battle axe cockroach barely surviving in a pristinely clean kitchen, with no other homes to invade within miles. That cockroach can attest to the fact that it was not always that way. The crumbs were plentiful between 1995 to 2006.

I have this profound theory about Christian pop star Amy Grant. My theory is that Amy was the original Christian Contemporary Music (CCM) upstart that got the ball rolling for what would much, much later evolve into the identity known as Lo Tom. Does this sound like a ridiculous conclusion to make? Let me elaborate.

If you were born in the 1970s, you might recall there was a time when kids sat around campfires and sang "Kumbaya." In today's societal norms, it would be way more desirable

to sit at home and watch Netflix reruns. But back in the day, kids actually did that, at least some did. That is because there was this riptide phenomena known as the Jesus Movement, which allegedly started when a young man with long blond hair raised his index finger into the air at a religious rally. (Try that now and you might get another finger raised back at you.) The 1970s were a unique time. The smoke from the Vietnam War slowly dissipated and people were searching for meaning. Many in that time found meaning in religion and spirituality. I can remember as a kid there were scads of Christian Bookstores. I walked in one when I was eleven years old, looking for something that sounded like Kiss. I came out with an Andrae Crouch album.

The CCM entity was alive and well as a successful commercial enterprise from approximately 1970 to 1991. Why 1970? Because that was the year when a straight-laced pastor shook hands with long-haired Jesus freaks and said it was ok to be hippies and go to his church. The band Love Song got the ball rolling in 1970 and smoothed over the rough edges for other groups to do the same. And why did it end in 1991? Because that is the year that God and the Devil waged a bet on CCM pop singer Amy Grant. Here is how it went down:

Devil: You know, I'm getting tired of this Jesus hoopla lasting as long as it has. Why do your followers need their own music and festivals? Don't you think it's time to give it a break and let them do music for EVERYBODY for a change? I mean, how many uninspired albums does Larry Norman have to put out before people realize he should have hung it up a decade ago?

God: Look, I know there are some embarrassing personalities out there. But you have to see it from my perspective. A lot of my people are having extraordinary epiphanies, and that brings me joy. Mind you, some of the music does suck.

Devil: Ya think?!? That's an understatement! I *do* wish you had not taken Bob Dylan from my camp....

God: Bob Dylan?!? I never *had* Dylan. He only came on board for a few years.

Devil: Yeah, he's always been an independent thinker. Better off that way.

God: Now if I could get my hands on Robert Plant....Whooo-Whee, that dude can sing....

Devil: Not a chance. Robert is too mystical.Hey listen, I have something I want to get your input on. Sort of a game-changer.

God: What do ya have in mind? This better be good, Snake Eyes!

Devil: You know that sexy pop singer of yours from Georgia? What's her name, Amy Green?

God: Grant. What about her?

Devil: Well, you know that none of your followers are getting on the mainstream charts.

God: There seems to be some walls up preventing that. Now what is your point?

Devil: Christians have their own music charts. How can they make it big if no one is making the plunge? They can stay happy on their own little charts. In the world, not of it, right?!?

God: Hey, easy there! I didn't make those charts. They were created by people. Of course they are going to be flawed. If I had my way, I would have.....

Devil: Now just hear me out. You and I both know that this religious hysteria is responsible for a lot of the sub-par music in circulation. How are we going to put an end to this? What if we get that hottie Amy to make it big-time? She's got moves and charisma and a voice and.....

God: C'mon, you know I'm not going to surrender her to your side.

Devil: You don't have to. I just want her to swim with the big fish rather than in the fish bowl. How about we place a bet on her? If Amy can land a platinum hit, then you let this Jesus Movement hoop-la go down the same path as 8-track tapes and tupperware parties. Deal?

God: I kind of like tupperware. Uggghh....Fine! Some of that music is lacking. And I do value honesty and integrity. I really do hate scandals, which are inevitably going to happen. All I ask is that you do not mess with Amy.

Devil: Now we're talking, G.

God: And if Amy does not make it big, I get Robert Plant.

Devil: Are you kidding me? You think Plant is that naive?

God: What makes you think you have any divine insight anyways? ...Now about that King's X band..??

Devil: yeah, no kidding... they should be the next Rush....

So God and the Devil talked long into the night about music, tattoos, and politics. Soon after, Amy met with a talented songwriter who gave her a catchy dance tune. Then she wrote lyrics about her young baby daughter that sounded like it could have been written for her lover. The song had a large appeal, even for all the guys who ever got a stiffy thinking about Amy. Not long after *Baby, Baby* climbed the charts to number one, other CCM artists also received mainstream popularity.

At this point, you may be questioning the reliability of that conversation between God and the Devil. However, my source is a friend of a sister's cousin who confided with me that she was privy to this conversation. This time-honoured tradition of truth-telling may be the most authentic account we have for this event. God and the Devil wagered a bet and the deal went down. End of story.

Around the time CCM artists began getting more popular, alternative music became the next big music genre. With alternative music, there was no obvious stigma over one's religion or culture in relation to the product. If your music was good, you got a chance to be heard. If your music sucked, it made the trash heap. What mattered was that you were on a label, got good distribution, had a kick-ass sound, and enough people thought your music was worth listening to. Take for example Mike Knott, who went under the moniker of Michael Moret. Mike released a dance track, "Want Me," that did well in the dance clubs. Do you think the gatekeepers researched his religious affiliation before the song charted? No such thing happened. Knott was embarrassingly stuck with a dance hit he had not ever envisioned.

Now what does all this have to do with Lo Tom? When Amy's *Baby, Baby* gained nationwide airplay and video exposure, this became the sperm needed to shoot life into bands like Lo Tom decades later. No one back in the early 90s knew the shit storm that would take place. From 1991 to now, the hands of time have moved prevalently towards more cultural and global awareness. We have been introduced to 9/11 & weapons of mass destruction, cloning, Facebook, LGBT civil liberties, ISIS,

artificial intelligence, the iPhone, crystal meth, Nickleback, Rob Bell, Brexit, craft beer, and Lo Tom. But remember one thing; what pre-empted all of these was the deal God and the Devil made. That one insular event catapulted everything towards the wheels of post-modernity rolling ever more rapidly. You can blame God for conversing with the Devil. Or you can blame the Devil for coming up with the deal. You can even blame me for risking to share the truth. But the fact remains *Baby, Baby* went big time in 1991. So if you are going to place blame on something material, it might as well be Amy.

I blame Amy for Chagall Guevera and Prayer Chain breaking up prematurely. I blame Amy for Vengeance Rising growler Roger Martinez disavowing thrash and selling his soul for real estate profits. I blame Amy for the Aunt Bettys' outrageous and short-lived tour debauchery. I blame Amy for Jennifer Knapp kissing a girl & liking it and not responding back to my love note in 2001. I blame Amy for dozens upon dozens of Christian metalcore bands that decided they had enough of the "Christian" label and not bothering to tell their fans. I even blame Amy for Carman, even though I am having a hard time finding something to blame her for on that one. Last but not least, I blame Amy for the existence of Lo Tom twenty-six years later.



LIVE REPORT: THE ALARM

New Orleans - 7.28.17 (House of Blues)

by Mike Indest



Before I write a review of the show, I want to share a bit about how much The Alarm has meant to me since the very first time I heard them and how much they still mean to me today. The first time I saw the video for "The Stand", I was blown away! Acoustic guitars, harmonicas and an amazing song all delivered with the energy and passion that can only be expressed when rooted in true conviction. I was sold! I bought into what they were selling hook, line and sinker.

I can't really say for sure that The Alarm is the reason I started playing guitar or started writing songs, but I can say for sure that they formed the way I play and write. I remember analyzing their writing style, and while I don't sound anything like The Alarm, they formed my songwriting DNA.

One thing that really drew me in was that I believed what they were singing about. I believed so much that at 18 years old I hitchhiked over 1000 miles, slept in parks and showed up dirty, scraggly and uninvited to introduce myself and say thanks. In retrospect, this was a bit rude on my part but Mike and Jules were gracious and kind. My belief was confirmed, Mike was the real deal.

I've gone on to work in the music business and in radio for the last 25 years and have never met anyone who is as enthusiastic and as engaging as Mike Peters. So that being said, on with the show!

This was my third time seeing The Alarm. Twice now in New Orleans and once in Nashville. There was no opening act, who would want that job? Mike took the stage with an acoustic guitar, several harmonicas and a kick drum. Along with Mike, was James Stevenson on bass and guitar, Smiley on drums and for the encore Jules Peters on Keys.

They tore through a set of hits and favorites including "Sold Me Down The River", "The Stand", "Strength" and "68 Guns". The setlist relied mostly on songs from their first few records. They delivered these songs with grit, passion and energy and the crowd felt every bit of it as we sang along. Now that rock is getting older I've seen a lot of mature bands who just phone it in. The Alarm played with the energy and passion of bands half their age. As I said earlier, Mike Peters is the real deal whose passion is infectious on and off stage.

They are still on tour in the States for a little while longer. If you need a reason to believe in Rock and Roll again don't miss this opportunity to see The Alarm.

(Mike Indest has worked in the music business and in radio for the past 25 years, is a Lutheran Chaplain, and has just released a music retrospective that you can download for free at mikeindest.bandcamp.com.)

LIVE REPORT: U2

New Orleans
by Mike Indest

The first time I was able to see U2 play live was September 25th, 2006. This was the first game the New Orleans Saints would play in the Superdome following hurricane Katrina. I was lucky enough to get last minute tickets for free and my brother-in-law and I hurried to the Superdome and made our way to our seats really close to the 40 yard line.

This was a big deal for the Saints to be playing at the Superdome again. To commemorate this event the pregame show needed to be just as epic and inspiring. A small stage was pulled out directly in our line of sight and U2, Green Day and some local brass bands played a short set including "Beautiful Day" and "The Saints Are Coming". Bono changed some of the lyrics to reference specific New Orleans neighborhoods.

The performance was the encouragement we all needed after a year of hearing all the bullshit from the news, family and friends about how New Orleans shouldn't rebuild or deserved the destruction. It was a much needed group therapy session consisting of almost 80,000 people that affirmed how and where we choose to live our lives.

Fast forward to Sept 14, 2017. I'm at the Superdome again, this time with my wife and thankfully again, with some pretty good seats. Of course I couldn't help but feel those emotions from 2006 rise up as I sat there and waited for the show to start. I'm sure there were plenty of others there that were feeling the same thing.

The show started with an audio recording of The Waterboys' "The Whole Of The Moon". U2 walked out on the smaller front stage with simple lighting and packed somewhat tightly together and opened the show with

"Sunday Bloody Sunday", "New Year's Day", "Bad" and "Pride (In The Name Of Love)".

After that set they moved to the big stage and played "The Joshua Tree" all the way through. One of my favorite U2 songs is "Red Hill Mining Town" which The Edge played on the piano while the video and audio of a Salvation Army Band played along on the screen.

The Joshua Tree has a lot of staying power and while it spawned several chart topping singles it is a great album all the way through. The last two songs "Exit" and "Mother's Of The Disappeared" shone a little brighter in a live context than they did on the recording which made for a great ending.

The encore featured "Elevation" and "Beautiful Day." Bono also spoke about The Edge's "Music Rising" charity that supplied musical instruments to New Orleans musicians after hurricane Katrina and is going to do the same for those who lost their instruments recently in Houston and Florida due to the recent hurricanes.

It was U2 so of course it was a great show and one I brought a lot of emotional baggage and expectations to. The hope and encouragement they provided after hurricane Katrina and the early inspiration they provided to me as an artist are the things that demonstrate how powerful and healing music can and should be.

Here's to hoping for an *Achtung Baby* anniversary tour!

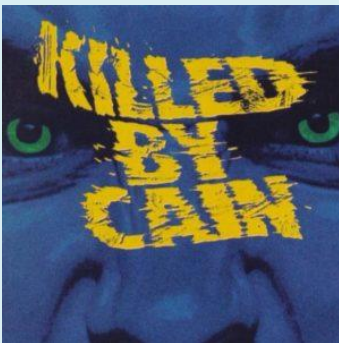
(Mike Indest has worked in the music business and in radio for the past 25 years, is a Lutheran Chaplain, and has just released a music retrospective that you can download for free at mikeindest.bandcamp.com.)



Writ on Water | *A Charcoal Night* | 2017 Independent | writonwater.bandcamp.com | Writ on Water has returned with a new ep of two older songs and four new songs. Don't worry if that description makes it sound like this is a disjointed ep of leftover tracks – *A Charcoal Night* sounds like a cohesive whole project rather than a b-sides collection. Whether that is talent or intention or both, I will leave up to you to decide. For the two older songs, there is "Wicker" in its original arrangement, and a studio recording of "Windsor" – a song which had originally been demoed for The Greyest Day. Despite the time between releases, Writ on Water never seems to lose a step. They can still write (and record) moody, ethereal alternative rock. For example, the first new track, "Twenty-Three," starts off with a two minute instrumental intro full of intricate interplay between instruments that oozes more atmosphere and feeling than many bands do in an entire album. I'm also glad that "Windsor" finally sees the light of day again – it was originally on The Greyest Days Sessions disc... I always liked it way back when that album was available. If you are a fan of Writ on Water, this ep is another great addition to your collection. If you are not a fan but like deep, moving alternative rock, carve out some time to give this ep a listen. This one is a serious contender for my top albums of 2017 list. Also for fans that have not heard yet, Writ on Water has an exclusive song called "Placate" on the Opus Zine compilation *Twenty Years and Counting* along with Sam Billen, the Revolutionary Army of the Infant Jesus, Caul, and many more – don't miss that one as well. (Matt Crosslin)



Advent | *Pain & Suffering* | 2017 Bridge Nine Records | bridge9.bandcamp.com | Advent, a four piece band from North Carolina, came on my radar through the Bridge Nine Records label. I was unaware of their previous incarnation as Beloved, a band that you might remember being on Solid State Records back in 2008 and 2009. Beloved broke up around 2011, and Advent formed in 2015. Their first release is the four song EP *Pain and Suffering*, and this is a solid release! Everything that I love about hardcore is on here; the breakdowns, the blast beats, and the riffs that chug along with the force of a locomotive about to run off the tracks! What's not to love? These guys have been snatching accolades from the scene for a few years now. I came late to this party, but if Advent is the future of hardcore, we're in capable hands! A must have! (Ellis in the Orchard)



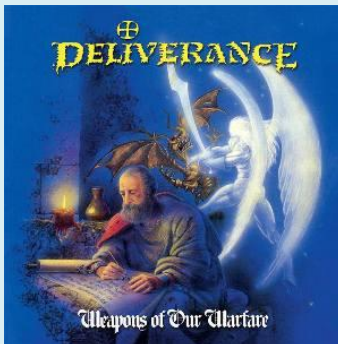
Killed by Cain | *Killed by Cain [Retroarchives Edition]* | 2017 Retroactive Records | boonesoverstock.storenvy.com | We all probably remember how the 90s produced a massive amount of bands that put out one album and then disappeared. One would assume that quality was a factor in the lack interest in many of those bands, and that would be a good assumption in most cases. However, Killed by Cain was the exception to this assumption. When their self-titled debut album was released in 1993 on R.E.X. Music, some compared their sound to Guns N' Roses meets Metallica (or Pantera or Sepultura, depending on how deep their metal knowledge went). That is fair starting point. In the Christian world, this was "converted" into Bride meets The Crucified on the front cover promo sticker... which is not a good description at all. Back in the day, I was instantly hooked on the sound Killed by Cain created. Pummeling riffs melding with slick grooves all over the place. But I remember that me and the only other person I ever knew that liked the album had the same problem with it: the sound was muddy, muddy, muddy. Like listening with actual mudballs stuck in your ears. I don't know if it was the mix or the mastering or what, but we used to lament that it needed a sonic improvement someday... realizing that day would probably never come because they didn't quite "make it." Luckily, we were wrong on that front... because here we are in 2017 with Retroactive Records re-issuing one of my favorite unknown bands. Of course, the big question is: did they improve the sound, or was it too mucked up to even make it worth the effort? I admit that some re-issues just clean-up bad sonic quality material and the results are mixed at best. With this remaster job, my verdict is: pedal to the metal! The mix is clean and improved, without sounding like they had to cut out the low end to deal with muddiness. Although, I have to point out that you actually have to listen through a real stereo or decent headphones to actually appreciate that difference – no ear buds! My musical tastes have expanded into more mellow and alternative music since 1993, but this album still scratches an itch for loud music that has its own sound. It is also shorter than I remember it – 10 songs, with one of them being an intro – seemed longer back in 1993. But as I would have said back then (if I had noticed): all killer, no filler! Oh, and this album is also getting the vinyl treatment as well! Hope I can swing that someday with so much great vinyl coming out. Also, keep your eye out for their demo collection album – they used to be a more straight-forward metal band called White Ray that put out several popular demos in the tape trading underground. Retroactive Records is putting that collection out in the near future as well. (Matt Crosslin)



Various Artists | *We Bear the Scars* | 2017 Independent | benefitcomp.weebly.com | This is a killer compilation in the vein of the old Helpless Amoungst Friends albums. How this hasn't sold thousands of copies yet is beyond me. The rare Living Sacrifice and Warlord tracks alone should move several hundred copies each by themselves. Come on – Warlord came out of retirement to record a killer groovy track. Living Sacrifice contributes a long lost track from the Hammering Process sessions that was unreleased until this comp. Un. Re. Leased. Living. Sacrifice. people! But that is not all. As far as I can tell, this is the only place to currently hear a song by The Satire – a new band with Jim Chaffin and Bryan Gray. And a trippy chaotic awesome song it is! Or how about the only known recording by Deathbed Atheist (Matt Johnson of Roadside Monument + Ryan Clark of Demon Hunter + Nathan Burke of Frodus)? You know that one slays just by reading the players. Then you have the doom of AAPOAA (Brian Fletcher post-Warlord). Plus Eso-Charis throwing in a rare 7-inch track. Or what about The Soul's Unrest featuring Blaze Pearson of World Against World? Unteachers, Maranatha, and Death Therapy all contribute brutal tracks. Plus a bunch of indie/up and coming bands to discover – 18 tracks in all. These are not leftover songs that should have stayed buried, either. These are top-notch songs that cover a variety of brutal metal genres. The best part is that this album is a fundraiser for Timothy "Greybeard" Henderson, drummer for Warlord, Mr. Bishops Fist, and Catechumen. According to the compilation website, Timothy "has fibromyalgia & several other health issues that have put his family in great financial need over the last 11 years." Tim is a great guy that I know through Facebook. We have been having a deep philosophical discussion on and off for years now that will hopefully get finished and published in Down the Line. But his condition slows that down, like everything else in his life. So grab a copy or two, spread the word, and get this compilation out to as many people as possible to support a great cause! (Matt Crosslin)



Aberrations of Light | *Banuary* | 2017 Independent | aberrationsoflight.bandcamp.com | This ep almost slipped through the cracks. That would be a shame if it did, because this is an excellent album of drone/ambient/instrumental music. Aberrations of Light is Mark Skelton, who set out to record one song a month for a year. The song titles are those dates – so it looks like we only have half a year so far. If I am reading the BandCamp page correctly, this is all mostly guitar and various effects (and maybe some samples of some type of instructional program that I hear in the background?). The ep's own self-description is the best I can think of to describe it: "a gorgeous and meditative recording of billowing and cascading guitar tones." The July entry is out of order, and is about twice the length of the other songs. I wonder if there is a hidden meaning there? I would agree with others that it is my favorite track on the album. It serves as a good climax to album, with a final December track to finish out with. But if you like to listen to ambient beauty with a good dose of drone to ponder life or enjoy the scenery with, I would recommend checking out this ep. Also available in cassette form, probably perfect for a road trip down memory lane in an old car that still has a cassette player. (Matt Crosslin)



Deliverance | *Weapons of Our Warfare [The Originals Remastered]* | 2017 Bombworks Records | boonesoverstock.storenvy.com | Twenty-seven years ago, Deliverance recorded a follow-up album to their spectacular debut. Let us be clear, Brethren and Sistren, Weapons was a thrash masterpiece. It earned unique distinction amongst metal purists as an epic release. The album was mixed by the legendary Bill Metoyer and produced by their then-new guitarist George Ochoa, and the results were stunning. Weapons was remastered by Rob Colwell at Bombworks Sound in 2008, and then remastered again by Cliffy aka J Powell at Steinhaus in 2017 for this Bombworks Records edition. Like any album that is high in demand, you keep pressing it, make some improvements, and it still sounds like pure gold! I barely know where to begin with describing the attributes of this album. Fans will know this album inside and out. If you are new to the scene, or need a refresher, the title track had a video which got some MTV action. The two guitars going ballistic on "This Present Darkness" is definitely worth noting. The "Greetings of Death" track was originally from their early 1985 demo by the same name, and it was the fastest and heaviest material out there by a faith-inspired thrash band, beating out Tempest (Ohio) – Annihilation of the Wicked demo by about a half year. Midway through the album is a dark yet eloquent thrash ballad "23," based on that particular Psalms passage. It was a ballad yet full of power and subtlety, a mix not easily found. Some of the songs are reminiscent of early Sodom, while others have the riffage-style of Slayer. But comparisons can be cheap, and Deliverance has forged their own sound, which gives them a matchless status as they approach thirty-two years of being a band! Can you say AMAZING?!? What warms my heart with Deliverance is that this band has been around longer than any other band playing Christian thrash, bar none. Their were some albums that veered towards alt metal in their career, but the solid guitar sound was always there. I recognize that Believer still does albums but not as consistently. And Tourniquet may be a solid contender, but they did not get out of the starting gate as early on as Deliverance. The real clincher is that Deliverance's new album, The Subversive Kind, is a bonafide cruncher, and freakin' incredible at that!! Any band that can pull off brilliant metal for over thirty years, unswerving in their convictions, is an enigma in my mind. Thank you to Jimmy Brown and to all the amazing people who have contributed to the legacy of Deliverance. God Speed! (Doug Peterson)



Lo Tom | *Lo Tom* | 2017 Barzuk Records | lotomlotom.bandcamp.com | Lo Tom came from several cool bands: Pedro The Lion, Starflyer 59, and Velour 100 to name the obvious ones. The common element amongst them is they played Christian festivals and local shows together. After a couple decades, the musical comradery is thick and defies anything that could have been achieved if done from obligation or contract. To clarify just how connected Lo Tom is, check out this graph, made with the love of detail only a music geek could possibly create: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BUfTfvUFbIV/>. The pop art cover, which I think has to be a joke, was designed by Demon Hunter's Ryan Clark.

The band made its entrance with TW Walsh and Jason Martin sharing music ideas online, then Bazan adding his voice to the riffage for a more elevated status. Bazan does not have to try hard to set a narrative in motion with his voice. He resonates deep tones, carrying more emotion than most seasoned singers. Trey's drumming and Bazan's bass set a solid foundation, and that gives the guitars a lot to work from.

Starting off is "Covered Wagon," a tongue-in-cheek storyline on the realities of touring. It also features all minor chords except the last chord of the song (I'll admit to hearing this on their KEXP live performance.) "Overboard" is up next, showing off a superb chorus hook. It sounds to be as a song that could have been on a Pedro album. It also strikes me as one person's side of a conversation, with the listener as a fly on the wall, only able to hear the voice closest to you. "Bubblegum" is the heaviest number of the project. You would swear they tapped into the soul of Malcolm Young (AC/DC) for the guitars on this sweet track. Things slow down a bit for "Bad Luck Charm," which features brooding guitar exchanges and a bass line reminiscent of what you would hear off of Winners Never Quit. The album ends on a passionate note with "Lower Down," the lengthiest track, as well as Bazan's most edgy singing.

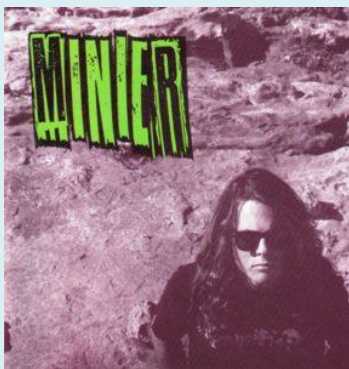
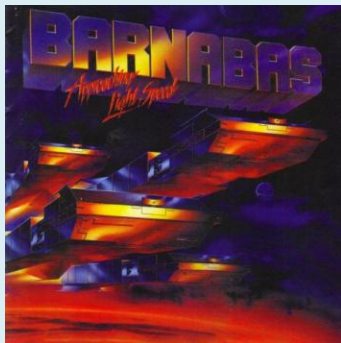
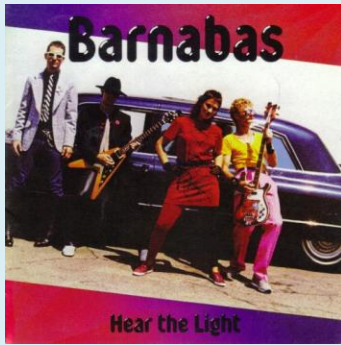
In my estimation, Lo Tom have found a niche amongst the best that indie rock has to offer. The songs are played with seasoned precision yet sound as effortless as putting on your favourite walking shoe. There is not a throw away moment on the entire album. This debut project has the appearance of something serious as opposed to a one-off. Here is hoping, anyways. (Doug Peterson)



Xalt | *Dark War (Retroarchives Edition)* | 2017 Retroactive Records | boonesoverstock.storenvy.com | Back in the 80s I was into metal (still am actually). I grew up in the Midwest and heavy metal was quite accessible. Growing up Christian meant I gravitated towards metal on Christian record labels. Let me tell you, there was a lot of Christian metal back then. But before I tell you my life story, one of the bands I listened to was Xalt. They put out four releases, with their fourth album being inconsistent from their others. This one, *Dark War*, their debut, was only made on cassette tape, and it was released before they got signed to Pure Metal. So this tape is a bit of a find. I actually had the tape sent to me from White Throne magazine back then. I listened to it and for some reason gave it away to a street kid who lived in a ministry house I frequented. That young guy actually liked the tape and did an air guitar performance to a song off the tape, "God In A Box." I was stoked about how much I enjoyed the song after I saw the air guitar performance.

So now twenty-five years later, this tape finally gets the merit it deserved back in the day. Fact is, nothing on this tape ever charted or launched the band to play festivals. It was a one-off tape that went nowhere. When I listen to it now, it sounds a bit dated and the vocals have an echo effect I am not crazy about. The lyrics are descent but they may come off a bit too evangelical in places. But on the plus side, the musicianship is very much working man's metal, on the level of any late 80s metal band. Guitarist James Erdman might be one of the great musicians of that time to not get the recognition. The real charm is that it is a practically undiscovered gem that gets a professional treatment a quarter of a lifetime later.

This Remastered Reissue also comes with five songs from their 1989 demo prior to their *Under The Ruins* release. Scott Waters of Ultimatum and Roxx Records reworked the cover art, touching it up with some color that enhances it to something astounding. Overall, this is a confident reissue of a tape that got lost in the stacks, and that makes me smile. I picked this one up and I encourage anyone who likes old school metal to do the same. (Doug Peterson)



Barnabas | *Hear the Light* | *Find Your Heart a Home* | *Approaching Light Speed (remasters)* | 2017 Retroactive Records | boonesoverstock.storenvy.com | The mighty Barnabas is back! The band is not, but their music is. Retroactive Records signed a deal with Nancy Jo Mann to remaster and repackage all five albums. Rob Colwell has done a competent job getting the sonics to be the best they can be. In this review I will focus on the first three of the five reissues that are coming out first, November 2017. The last two reissues of the Barnabas discography will be released in December, so stay tuned.

When Barnabas embarked on their musical journey, there were few bands doing anything like them in the faith community. There was Resurrection Band in Chicago, Bill Mason Band and Ishmael United in the UK, and Andy McCarroll & Moral Support in Ireland. *Hear the Light* came out in 1980 and it was a truly unique punk-esque album. A year later, Lifesavers with Mark Krischak released their *US Kids*, but that is another story. Barnabas, in their early formation, had guitarist Monte Cooley, who could write fast numbers with infectious distortion like no other. What placed Barnabas on top of the rock pile were Nancy Jo Mann's soaring vocals, backed by a beefy and intricate rhythm section. Songs such as "Savior," "Directory Assistance," "B.C.," and "Playin' for Him" are reckless and melodic, trademarks of the first album. On this reissue, the overall sound is more full. The vocals have more clarity, the bass is improved, and the guitars are more proportional in the mix. Hands down better.

On *Find Your Heart a Home*, the sound once again is improved with the reissue. Guitars and bass get their due place in the recording. With this album, Barnabas lost Monte and gain two guitarists who play well but nothing identifiably extraordinary. Keyboards become a staple element due to bassist Mann's love for full arrangements. *Find Your Heart a Home* has a myriad of rock variations, from the hard-rollicking to blues-infused and even a bit of funkiness. Drummer Kris Klingensmith began showing more maturity in his lyrics. "Conflict of Desire" and "Way of Destruction" are a couple of fast, progressive tracks that sound stellar even after repeated listening. The album ends off with the memorable "Southern Woman," reminiscent of Jefferson Starship at their finest. A solid album; consistent yet diversified.

Their third album, *Approaching Light Speed*, brings guitarist Brian Bellow to the helm. Bellow is a shredmeister much like Randy Rhoads. What I adore about this album is how it cements Barnabas doing metal. Barnabas can do many styles of rock proficiently, but it is at this juncture that they find the foundational sound which carries them to the end of their musical career. Once again, Rob Colwell does a spectacular job on remastering. The snares and bass fit like a glove and Nancy Jo's voice is compelling and rapturous. With Klingensmith penning lyrics and Mann on music composition, Barnabas had grabbed hold of a winning combination. The year this album came out was the same year Dio put out the quintessential *Holy Diver*, Iron Maiden released *Piece of Mind*, Def Leopard launched *Pyromania*, and Motley Crue unleashed *Shout at the Devil*. Barnabas had some tough competitors... but they fared quite well. On the faith side of the coin, you had Rez Band, Jerusalem, Daniel Band, Leviticus, and Stronghold, amongst a few others. Barnabas was unique in that they played top-notch progressive metal infused with intelligent lyrics, with a singer who could belt it out like a rock goddess. Tracks like "Stormclouds," "Waiting for the Aliens," and "Subterfuge" still make the hair on my neck rise. If you like metal done well, this is a must-have. (Doug Peterson)

Minier | *Minier (Expanded Edition)* | 2017 Retroactive Records | boonesoverstock.storenvy.com | Back in 1990 when thrash was a big deal in the Western world, a prolific Christian crossover (one part punk, one part metal) band recorded their debut album. The guitarist decided to record some songs on a 4 track for fun. These songs did not fit The Crucified's style, so the demo tape ended up on the desk of REX Records... and the demo became an album. It was a good collection of thrash demos. What I did not realize until recently is that Greg Minier, who played and sang everything on the entire album, recorded the songs without bass. The rationale back then was that they were demos, and Metallica had released their *...And Justice For All* that year without bass (Jason Newsted actually did record bass on that album but thanks to ego-maniacs in Metallica, you can not hear them).

I thought the *Minier* album was solid then and I think it sounds better with age. The expanded edition is the *Minier* album plus demos done in 1988 and 1989, along with a radio show interview recorded around the time of the release. One of the expanded edition tracks worth mentioning is a fun demo entitled "Mulligan Barf," which is Greg's satirical rendering of the Vengeance Rising's "Mulligan Stew." I won't spoil it for you, but you will spill a gut listening to it.

You can order this CD, complete with a 6-panel insert, at Boone's Overstock. Just throw that in the search engine and wait for the tunes to arrive. Note: *Minier* is great for driving, cooking, and construction work. It might be good for cleaning fish, but it has been awhile since I've been fishing. (Doug Peterson)



U2 | *Songs of Experience* | 2017 Interscope Records | u2com | Let's be honest here: most people had already decided whether or not they would like the new U2 album before they even heard it. You could have probably predicted who would have liked it and who would have hated it before they ever tweeted or posted on Facebook about it. Yes, I tend to like U2 albums, but it has always been a process. You see, I wasn't sold on *The Joshua Tree* and *Achtung Baby* when I first heard them back in the day. But I kept hearing them so much that I came around to loving them as some of my favorite albums. So I have to look at each new U2 album as a process. I initially liked *No Line on the Horizon* but it kind of started falling apart the more I listened to it. I still like some of the songs, but I prefer to skip some of them as well. I initially didn't know if I would like *Songs of Innocence* because of several songs, but after repeat listens, I love it as a whole album. *Songs of Experience* I liked initially, and that seems to be holding up after repeat listens... even though there are a couple of songs I could do without on it.

Of course, my initial appreciation may be because *Songs of Experience* is pretty much *Songs of Innocence* part 2. You could find someone that hasn't heard either album, play both albums on a randomized playlist, and that person would probably not be able to tell you which album the songs came from without examining the lyrics. And even that is not a given. These two discs are basically parts 1 and 2 of one double album.

Songs of Experience opens with a more atmospheric moody piece called "Love is All We Have Left" – which is a bit different place than *Songs of Innocence* started off at: the lead single right out of the gate. While that will be hard for some that want the big hit up first, it still works nicely when listening to the whole album (even if it doesn't really stand on its own as a song). This song leads into even more album set-up with "Lights of Home" – a song designed to build up to the singles, but still not quite a single itself. Still a great way to build a mood. This mood kicks into high gear with the first punch of the 1-2-3 knockout of the first half: "You're the Best Thing About Me." Probably one of the catchiest songs about a really sad topic (how people have to leave loved ones to work, serve, even live). I have heard this song playing on pop radio stations around town, and it works great as a killer single. Next up is another single "Get Out of Your Own Way" – a bit more down tempo than the last song, but still a great groove. This song ends with a spoken word modern take on the Beatitudes that leads to the fuzzy, nasty rock of "American Soul." This song is pure, great driving music. It is technically a song built around the breakdown from "Volcano" off of *Songs of Innocence* ("You and I are rock and roll..."). Its a great song, but the break down in "Volcano" had a bit more punch. "Summer of Love" is a pretty song, but I wouldn't miss it if it was gone. "Red Flag Day" takes a while to build up, but works a lot better once the full groove kicks in. It is one of those songs that you have to hear all the way through first to really appreciate, cause you have to know where it is going to like it. If that makes sense. "The Showman (Little More Better)" is U2 going being whimsical and romantic, almost like they did on "The Sweetest Thing." "The Little Things That Give You Away" and "Landlady" are decent songs, but they feel a bit like filler to get to 13 songs. Why 13? Well, we'll get to that in a second. What follows next seems to be everyone's favorite song on the album, and I would agree. "The Blackout" is a snarling rocker that sounds like it could have been front and center on *Achtung Baby*. I would have honestly cut about 2-3 of the filler songs on this album and replaced them with songs like "The Blackout" or "American Soul" to give the album an over "feeling" of experience that is slightly lacking. "Love is Bigger Than Anything in Its Way" is another filler song. "13 (There is a Light)" is the 13th song, which I guess was important to end the album with that number (although I am not sure why). It is basically a reprise of "Song for Someone" off of *Songs of Innocence* with a new verse or two. It works well because the original is such a great song.

So in the end, I find *Songs of Experience* to be a mostly great album with some filler that I would probably skip. I actually like the buildup songs at the beginning, but find some of the mood-building tracks at the end to be unnecessary. Overall, probably still a step behind *Songs of Innocence* for me, but still an overall enjoyable album to listen to. (Matt Crosslin - read the even longer review online: <http://downthelinezine.com/reviews/u2-songs-of-experience/>)



Untitled by Rick McDonough